2: Hulstaert

Mongo FO32

583

/For information concerning the mode of marriage and bride-price among the Nkundu, see category 116, pp. 81-82, 101-104, 109-172, 175-176, 190, 192-206, 218-220, 270-271, 332-333, 334, 414-415, and 423-424./

843 bokeka. The same is true if the pregnancy is the result of adultery;
837 the natural father must bear all the consequences of his act. The husband is absolved from them and has no relations with his wife until the end of this particular pregnancy. The culprit must give him a pledge by which he publically recognizes his responsibility, and he is expected to fulfill all the duties of a husband. Therefore he may have relations with the woman during her entire pregnancy without paying additional indemnities. If any accident befalls the mother or the child, he is made to pay a large indemnity.

Note finally that, as we have pointed out in Chapter II,
● [583] Article XI, no bride-price payment can be made from the time the pregnancy becomes visible until after the end of the period of seclusion.

843 To facilitate childbirth the previously mentioned concoc-
844 tion of various leaves mixed with kaolin (isaá) is continuously ap-
757 plied to the abdomen. Medical scarifications on the abdomen are also performed.

Finally, as the time of delivery approaches, special douches
[278] made from a concoction of the bark of the boímbo tree (1) are

> 1. Certain douches, especially the one made of boímbo, are also used as abortive agents.

administered. All these treatments are called beté bya bosánjá, that is, medicines (for the purpose) of an easy delivery.

Article III. Birth

844 1. Delivery

A woman remains with her husband for childbirth; she does not go home to her family. Only exceptionally does she give birth elsewhere -- for instance, if she has been sent home for one reason or another, or during a trip, while working in the fields, near a stream, or a spring, etc. Such sudden unexpected deliveries

613 member. In the case of common use or of an exceptionally good
423 yield (large game, a rich haul of fish, large yield from a particular cultivation of common property, such as palm beer), these are divided by the clan leader and their respective shares allotted to all members.

613 Personal property consists of the hut and the tools of the man, the
422 furniture of the woman, and the domestic animals. These are movable and can also go out of the clan through inheritance. Should they leave their husbands, married women may taken with them whatever they have received or inherited personally from their wise.

421 In contrast to the economic property of the clan, there is the dotal
613 or capital property, the marriage settlements, which do not have economic, but only legal value. They represent the rights over people.
583 In the first place we find those persons who themselves are the source of rights: the marriageable girls (bibunanyi) of the clan /A/ and the substitutes for women married into the clan /A/—that is, the women who are married into the allied clan /B/ with the acquired bride price (nkita). /Ed. Clan A pays bride price for a woman from clan B, the allied clan. Then clan B uses this acquired bride price to obtain another woman in marriage, a "substitute." This substitute is nkita to
[567] the original woman./ In addition, there are the slaves who can replace a caput. In the second place, there are the titles which represent
421 a caput: the /153/ so-called dotal securities (baumba). These dotal
613 securities or titles are kept by the clan leader and, with the knowledge of his immediate successor, hidden somewhere in the ground. With the approval of the clan council, he may also lend them out. These dotal possessions or rights are also common property of the clan and are used to procure a wife for the clan members, each in his turn.

The common ownership of the economic property makes possible the difficult sharing of woods and river, prevents the cutting up of the property, hinders the impoverishment and the proletarization of the poor, and insures the livelihood of all of the clan members. This common ownership has nothing more to do with communism than the common ownership of property in our nuclear families.

The dotal or capital property, the bride price titles, which have perhaps aroused the most indignant and lofty compassion of our civilized world, have less to do with buying and selling the wife then our own dowry and class system. They are permanent legal titles of the contract which is made between the clans of the couple on the occasion of the marriage. Our individualistic liberalism and mercantilism have regarded these legal securities only through economic spectacles and

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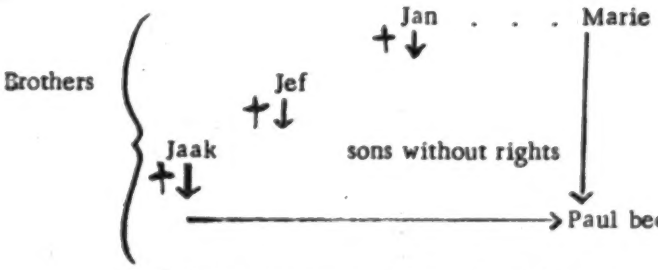
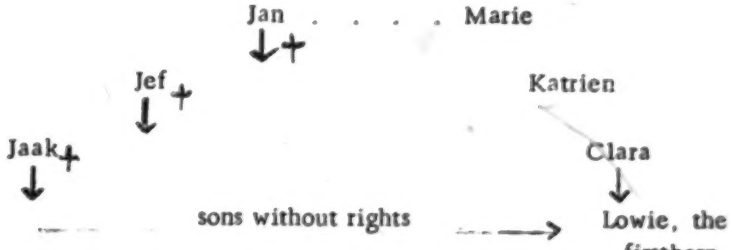
their sister, bona wa nkana. As an example:



Or if there were more sisters, the rights passed to the firstborn son of those sisters; for instance:



He consequently became the father and supreme head of the family upon the death of the three brothers.

596 583 562 In order to understand this peculiar custom clearly, some explanations should be given. The custom in this country is that the woman is sold; not a single one escaped that general rule in former days. With that money the father or brother bought, or rather, had to buy himself another woman. This wife belonged, however, to the daughter or sister who had been sold; the daughter or sister called her nkita, "goods" or "property." The children born of this nkita called her [the woman sold]: is'e 'omoto, "female father." Even if she brought male children into the world, the rights of their mother passed to them, and [334] their mother was called father by the children of the nkita. According to our ideas, they were only nephews. That held even if the woman was still not paid for; it was enough that a ndanga, a security as proof of further payment, had been given. It was also not

596 necessary for her father or brother to have brought her to the man and
583 to have received money for her; another member of the family was
56 sufficient. She was sold by her family and accordingly, wherever the money had remained or whoever had received it, she had her rights in the family. Since the family maintained itself through the sale of the children of the female sex, the male children born of them were considered as the masters, the rightful claimants, the fathers. There was no exception to this rule; it was not to be altered, and no one had ever thought of disputing the place of the claimant or of laying claim to his rights. I have only heard of one single case of that sort, namely, at the succession of the Ruki, the younger brother was said to have killed his older brother in order to take over his place. He was said to have made a hole in his brother's proa, so that it sank when it reached the middle of the stream. The matter in itself seems an impossibility; also I consider it a legend, unless an accident might have happened that was interpreted in a mistaken or deliberately false manner.

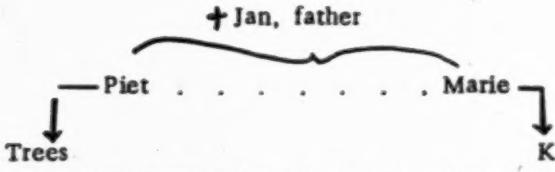
596 The rightful dlaimant, bona wa nkana, sister's son, might
576 still be a child; nevertheless he was called father and everyone vied with one another in showing him the honor due a father. That was the unbreakable law, not only for the father common to the hamlet, boloi, but also for the father of each individual family.

Nkita

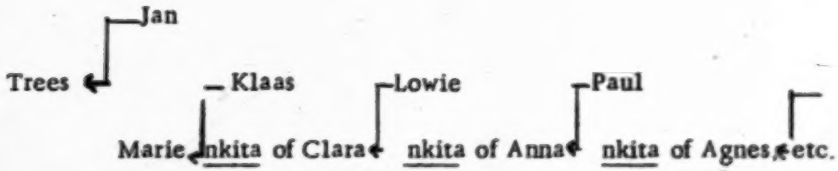
583 Nkita is what the woman is called who is bought with the money
602 that the father or brother has received for his daughter or sister on the occasion of her marriage. In reality, however, she is only the nkita, goods or property, of the so[illegible] woman. Nkita ekam, "my property," this woman calls her. For instance, Jan [335] sells his daughter, Marie, to Klaas and buys another wife, Trees, with the money received. The latter woman is now the nkita, the property, of Marie.

583
602

Or else, father Jan having died, Piet sold his sister, Marie, to Klaas and buys Trees with the money:



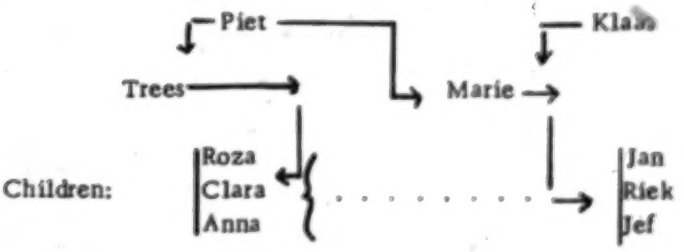
Practically speaking, Marie profited very little from her nkita. She had, it is true, certain rights over her nkita; thus, the latter considered her as her mistress, helped her in sickness and heavy work. Unfortunately for her, what she gained on the one side she lost again on the other side, in that she herself was also the nkita of another woman and consequently had the same obligations to fulfill towards the latter that her own nkita owed her. For example:



Jan, then, sold Marie to Klaas in order to buy Trees; Klaas, however, in order to be able to buy Marie, sold in turn his sister, Clara, to Lowie; Lowie acquired the necessary money to buy Clara by marrying off his sister, Anna. Thus, Trees then became the nkita of Marie, Marie the nkita of Clara, Clara of Anna, Anna of Agnes, etc. In short, every wife had her nkita and was, with few exceptions, the nkita of another wife. I say with few exceptions; for example, the wife was not the nkita of another woman if her husband had bought her with his own earned money. Practically speaking, this changed the matter very little. Also [336] there was no change if the nkita of a woman died; it was only a loss for the buyer or owner of that woman.

Rights of the Male Children in Relation to the Nkita of Their Mother

596 583 605 We have already seen that the right of succession and fatherhood passed to the male children of the sister, because she had been sold and had brought money into the family, or rather because she had a nkita there, a sort of guarantee for the money that had been received for her. Nkita-ship brought another right to them, namely, the female children born of the mother's nkita belonged to them; they could sell them and get themselves other women with the money. They could [582] not, however, marry them, since they were their cousins, and custom was opposed to any marriage between relatives. The boys could, [602] nevertheless, take the nkita of their mother as a wife, since the Negroes have no notion of affinity or relationship by marriage. The male children were, then, the owners of the female children that the nkita of their mother brought into the world:



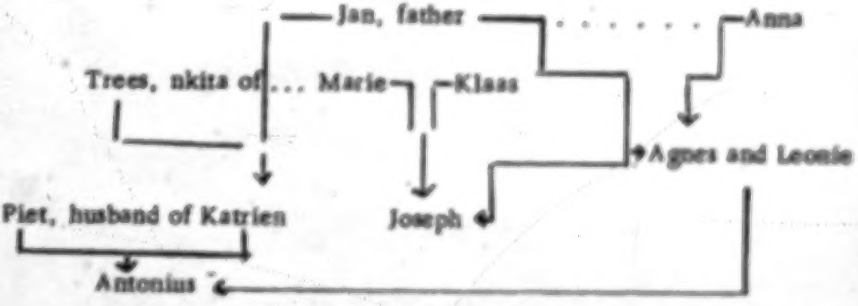
These three girls, children of nkita Trees, belong to the three sons of Marie. If Marie had only one son, then Piet would have the right to trade the two other girls for money and to buy other wives with this money, either for himself or for his younger brother; but if she [Marie?] brought female children into the world, half of them belong to Marie's son.

583 604 If the nkita gave birth to no children of the female sex, the boys of Marie could resort to the husband of the nkita of their mother, namely, their uncle, nyangobika. If, however, he had no fortune, no money, [337] no wives, no girls to sell ... or only wives to whom others could lay claim and had more right, then they were disinherited, poor devils in society, and it cost them long years of work and much

583 searching for old disputes and old arguments about wives to get a wife.
604 And then they were still not always successful: their youth itself was
against them here and robbed them constantly of the little that they
464 had saved for that purpose. The means for getting money, such as
lances, knives, arm and foot bands, were extremely scarce. The
Blacks do not know of workers or servants, and if one of those poor
souls presented himself at the home of one who was better endowed by
fortune and offered to chop wood for him, to lay out a manioc field,
or to build a house for him, to gather straw and bamboo in the forest
for that purpose, then the inborn laziness of the Negro would require
long months to complete that work. As salary, the worker received
only a few bakonga (copper arm of leg bands); these he already owed
to the owner for having shown too much inclination for one or another of
his wives. The result of this was that many young men remained with-
589 out a wife and that those who were favored by chance, that is to say,
595 had many children of the female sex in their family, each had several
562 wives. I consider this a primary cause of polygyny. The woman had a
relatively high monetary value and represented capital. Thus, it did
not happen that anyone gave his daughter or sister to another for
nothing, just as among us it does not happen that a farmer gives his
cow or horse to a poor devil for nothing.

583 If the father or brother sold a daughter born of the nkita of his
604 daughter or sister -- a right that general custom gave him and which
603 usually occurred, since the children of the female sex were sold very
young and the boys, the rightful claimants or owners, in that case were
still very young -- this was done in order to buy another wife. The rights
of the children shifted then as follows:

[338]



583 Jan, the father, by selling Katrien, the nkita of his daughter
604 Marie, becomes indebted to Joseph, the son of Marie and at the same
603 time his own grandson; and on the other side he becomes the debtor of Antonius, his other grandson, by selling his mother, Katrien.

Anna, whom he bought, was then the nkita of Katrien and the quasi-nkita of Marie. Both sons, Joseph and Antonius, were hard pressed because of Anna, the nkita of both of their mothers. If Anna bore two daughters, as I have indicated, the case was simple: the first daughter belonged to Joseph and the second to Antonius. If, however, she gave birth to only one daughter, then this child belonged to Joseph, and Antonius was left out in the cold. If father Jan had no children of the female sex by Anna, then the matter was extremely thorny for both of them, and if their grandfather or uncle possessed no money, had no more wives by whom he had daughters, there was nothing left for them to do but, at his death, to take the nkita of their mother as a wife. For this reason it happened many times that young men lived with old women, and even though there was then generally no more hope of children, those wives were then still good enough to cook the meals and do the little work that a Negro household requires.

000 I will not digress any further about the method of distribution of women, about the rights over the women which the nkita system brings with it. It would take us too far. Furthermore, not only the present, but also the past and the future are involved in it; so that one would have to be a Negro and trained in these matters to understand them clearly ... and even then they involve numerous palavers (disputes), which continually agitate the families and the villages.

[339] The Origin of the Nkita?

591 The sale of the woman and the immediate loss of her freedom
583 must naturally have given her cause for revolt. It has perhaps cost the
562 man a severe struggle to make the woman content with her lot. A compensation or reimbursement had to be given to her, and most certainly the nkita system has its origin there. It was at least a partial compensation that the man gave to the woman. It gave her rights over her nkita

596 and over the children who were born to the latter; even more, it gave
573 her own children rights which exist nowhere else in the world and prob-
562 ably among no other people: they became the superiors, the fathers of the family of their mother. Unfortunately, practically considered, the woman enjoyed very little of the gift which was given her; she remained what she was, slave of money, slave of the man. Even her children, for whom the nkita-ship secured such great advantages in her family, brought them into a false situation, in that it robbed them in the home of their own father of all the advantages that it brought them in the home of their mother's father. It was only the old and well-favored who actually gained advantage from the nkita system and enjoyed them.

1) It relieved them in the first place of all care on behalf of their daughters whom they sold while still children; and if later, after they were grown up, these daughters complained about the injustice done to them, they could answer them, "But, my dear daughter, I have done you no wrong; here in my own house is the woman whom I bought with your money; she belongs to you always, and the children that I have by her are your children; you are both their father and their mother; they will call you is'eomoto (female father), and in that capacity they will honor and serve you; the boys will at the same time be the children of your children, and the girls will be sold to give your sons the opportunity to buy a wife for themselves."

2) It discharged them for the most part from all care of providing a wife for their sons, and it denied the latter the right to make claims to the women whom the father possessed. [340] If the son begged his father for a woman, he could put him off and say to him, "But, my boy, you have the nkita of your mother; the children (girls) who will be born of her are for you. We shall sell them, and with the money we will buy you a wife." Most of those girls, however, were traded by the father for another wife, since his son was still, in that case, small. Almost all the women then ended up in the harem of the father before passing on to the son. Thus, after all, the nkita system only benefited the lust and the lasciviousness of the old Negro and made him the one and only master of the woman. Sons, daughters, wives, and children were, in contrast, the dupes and victims of the nkita-ship.

[531]

FAMILY LIFE AND CUSTOMS AMONG THE NATIVES OF EQUATORIAL AFRICA

583 The so-called marriage, or rather, the acquisition of a wife takes place:

1. Through a bride price to the family of the woman who is given;
2. Through buying, or the payment of an amount for a woman who is no longer in the hands of the family;
3. Through inheritance;
4. Through abduction.

Acquisition by bride price is called enga, njengenga: "the binding or engagement of oneself."

Acquisition by purchase is called somba, masomba: "buying."

When a woman is acquired through inheritance, the designation under which she was first acquired is retained. When the deceased father, uncle, or brother had acquired the woman by bride price or purchase, the heir will say: "I have taken this woman by bride price, purchase, etc."

Acquisition by abduction often occurred formerly in the tribal wars.

In disputes the natives often say: "He stole that woman." This is usually to announce the fact that the woman, according to them, was acquired in a dishonest manner.

The payment of bride price, purchase, etc., is usually made with a combination of money, objects, and male or female slaves.

This combined payment is called songa, masonga: "equalizing, settlement."

When a native is asked in what way he acquired his wife, he will usually say: njoloengaki (I have paid her bride price), because he [532] knows well that this is the most honest way. There are, however, many wives who have been acquired in the other way.

583 584 Acquisition by bride price sometimes begins before the birth of the expected daughter. The man, usually a polygynist, gives something of security to the father of the child. This security

583 consists of a beautifully fashioned native knife, or a lance, or
594 mitako [copper wire used as currency]. In some areas, it was the
[596] polygynist who attended the mother at the birth of the daughter. He had the wood gathered, water brought, and food prepared. If, then, the expected child was a boy, the security was usually returned, and the contract declared null and void. If, however, the one who had given the security was a village chief or a man of importance, then the father of the child tried to give him another daughter. The father had, for instance, at an earlier time given a daughter to another man of much less importance. In the above-mentioned case, he would give back the bride price received, take his daughter back, and give her to the polygynist from whom he expected a larger bride price.

583 Sometimes too the boy was taken by the polygynist and remained in his family until the father could trade a daughter for him.

583 While very young and still a child, the little daughter was
591 installed in the harem of the polygynist. She was brought up there, together with other children of her age and status; or rather, she grew up there in the midst of those heathen customs without any upbringing.

585 The composition of the harem of a polygamist:

The first wife was called the Bomatsa; she preceded all the other wives in rank, and in the absence of the polygynist, she was the mistress of the harem.

The second wife was called Ekila; she was the most loved and preceded all the remaining wives. She was also called Nkonda.

The third wife was called Bolumbu. At the appointment of the bolumbu, a certain ceremony took place, and the wife was clothed with an animal skin. The Nku, a sort of patriarch and
[203] magician, sometimes had three or four Bolumbu who served as
[12] messengers to other villages. In this capacity they had special privileges. For instance, to attack a Bolumbu was a reason for declaring war.

[533] The remaining women were simply women of the harem, without distinction.

585 In the area of Monjoku, among the Bokee [Boke], the first wife was called Nkisa, with the same rank as Bomatsa. The second

000 the same rights as the other children of the polygynist.

595 The polygynist always sought to increase the number of his
556 wives, for his prestige rose and his fortune increased in that manner.
593 If anyone in civilized lands seeks to enlarge his fortune, this is done, people say, in order to insure the future of his children. The native thinks little about that; his primary idea is to enjoy himself and to surpass others in prestige and esteem. As far as the future of his children is concerned, there are polygynists who possess twenty or thirty wives or even more, and sometimes they have only one or two children. Also it is little in keeping with their notions to care for the future; he who is still alive tomorrow must take care of
595 tomorrow then, so they reason. On the contrary, instead of caring
593 for his children, the polygynist often took great trouble to obtain a
534 wife for his son. The son, however, was not yet the owner of his
606 wife; it was, so to speak, only a loan. Not until after the death of his father did he become owner. In some districts, when the father had obtained a wife for his son, he first kept this wife for some time for himself. Only after a few months did he give her to his son. In
595 other districts, when the wife was pregnant by the son, he was obliged
593 to send her for a few days to his father. He was not allowed to bear
606 the honor of fatherhood alone; his father must share that with him.
842 The father reserved for himself the honor of naming all of the chil-
551 dren of his children. In some areas of the Congo, morals were so
835 low and common that the father even kept his own daughters in his harem. This did not occur in Equatorial Africa, but there was a custom that was not much better. The magician was sometimes
583 consulted about the bride price which the father tried to get for his
711 daughter, or the brother for his sister.

The magician then gave them the advice that they themselves should first have relations with their own daughter or sister. This custom existed almost everywhere in Equatorial Africa.

583 [536] Bride Price. In general, the daughter was given in marriage upon payment of a bride price. The father had little choice of the future husband of his daughter. The one who guaranteed the most goods in payment was certain to get her. Since, in most cases, the little daughter had not yet arrived at the years of maturity, there was naturally no question of her consent. The bride price was not paid all at once, but gradually during the years while the daughter grew up. Since the daughter was given without her consent

583 to an old, worn-out, gray-haired man, it naturally often occured that when she arrived at maturity, she no longer wished to remain with him. She therefore left him and went to another, or back to her family. In the latter case, however, great difficulties arose concerning the return of the bride price. Indeed, with the bride price the father had received for his daughter, he bought himself another wife. This wife was then called the Nkita of the daughter. We could translate Nkita in this case as "substitute." The Nkita represented the value of the sold or married daughter. Meanwhile, the daughter herself was often the Nkita of the daughter or sister of her husband. Thus, many women were the Nkita of each other. According to their customs the children (boys) were in theory the heirs of the Nkita of their mother. The Nkita was, in fact, the value or the bride price of their mother.

One might ask whether the wife was then always content that she was, so to speak, an object of trade. In general, yes, she was satisfied with this. This is how the customs were, and nobody gave a thought to changing them. Usually the wife simply found herself in an arranged situation (fait accompli). Gradually a certain sense of honor is coming into being among the Christian wives against these heathen customs.

If the woman desired that a large bride price or purchase price be paid for her, was it also because she wished to care for the future of her children who would be heirs of her bride price? No, they say, not for that reason -- for, they add, what woman knew in advance that she would have children, and moreover boys? There [163] are, in fact, many women who have no children. Also, [536] only 583 the boys are eligible for the inheritance; the girls are heirs only in 628 name. When it come to the inheritance, the children inherited the 587 Nkita of their mother only if there were no more brothers of the mother or uncles on their father's side. The mightiest always had the greatest right.

Usually a youth had to acquire a wife with the bride price or supplement of the bride price of his sister. The inheritance of the Nkita of his mother was only secondary. Still we often see a heathen wife leave her husband in order to go to another, without bothering much about her children who remain with the deserted husband, their father.

583 If the wife was content and if she insisted that a large bride price be paid for her, it was out of vanity and also to procure money for her family (father or brothers), and not out of concern for her children.

586 583 Divorce. When the wife left her husband to go back to her family, they had to give back the bride price they had received. In general this was a very difficult business, because the bride price was used by the father or the brother to obtain another wife for himself, the Nkita. Thus, in order to be able to return the bride price, they would have to sell this Nkita or give her back to her family and ask for the return of her bride price. There were few other ways to give back the bride price; all their property consisted of wives. Since the family usually could not or would not return the bride price, the deserted husband then sought to become the master of the mother or a sister of his runaway wife, whom he then kept as a hostage. Among the heathens, this was a commonly used expedient to retrieve the wife or the bride price. When the runaway wife discovered that her mother or sister was a prisoner of her former husband, she often went back out of sympathy for her mother or sister. When the wife had gone not to her family but to another man, which was often the case, the family urged this second husband to give the bride price to the first husband. This was usually the only practical means by which the difficulty was resolved. This second husband then paid the bride price to the first. Since the [537] bride price often had been only paid in part by the first one, he then paid the remaining portion to the family.

Sometimes, if there were no way to return the bride price, the woman was forced to go back to her deserted husband. To avoid unpleasant treatment, she had to feign submissiveness.

587 As soon as an agreement was arrived at, either with the family or with the second husband, over the return of the bride price, the first bond was considered broken. If the woman was with her family, she was considered free to enter into a new agreement. If, however, she was with another husband, then after the argument she was considered bound to that second husband. The primary bond of their agreement thus appears to be the bride price.

589 If the wife had children, these remained with their father, and the bride price was only partially returned. The value of the children was, so to speak, subtracted from the bride price.

837 When a wife of a polygynist had illicit relations with another
586 man of the same village, this was called Bonsamba. When she had such relations with a man of another village, this was called Isoke. As we have observed, the ordinary wives of the harem often had such relations. When the woman eloped with her bonsamba or isoke, or with whomever it was, she was pursued by her husband or owner, who tried to get her back. If the wife refused, negotiations over the bride price began.

If an agreement was reached or if a pledge was given as guarantee for the payment, the first bond was considered broken, and the woman was considered bound to this second man, even though he had been her bonsamba or isoke.

It might also happen that the first husband was so jealous that he did not want to make any agreement; then he attempted to kill either the guilty wife or her second husband. If the woman became
593 ill at the home of her husband, he went to tell her family and had to
758 give a security to the family.

583 Often the family came to get the wife, in order to be able to care for her better. If, in such a case, the wife [538] died at the home of her family, there were no further difficulties about the bride price, according to their customs. If, however, the bride price had still not been completely paid, the family asked their son-in-law to pay the remainder.

583 In recent times, now that the heathen customs have been
171 undermined by the European occupation, we see that the husbands whose wives have gone to their family when sick and have died there, demand the return of the bride price from the family, but this is completely contrary to their old customs. In one case the husband could demand the return of the bride price, namely, if the wife had left while healthy to go to her family and had died there.

562 Buying or Trading of Women. The woman was also in many
439 cases an acknowledged object of trade. The great village chiefs, among others Ibuka and Yoma, of whom we shall speak further, carried on a sort of woman trade. With European articles and also native currency, they went to other districts of the Equator [Province] to buy women with them, just like someone who goes to market, even though no public markets where women were sold actually existed.

000 What is one to do if even in such cases it is taught, "One must respect" the native customs?

587 428 [84] The inheriting of wives existed everywhere; it was, in fact, the only wealth left behind by the native. The details of the distribution differed according to district or tribe. Thus, for instance, in some districts it was the eldest son who alone inherited all of the wives of his father. This was in order to preserve the rank and the class of the family. Prestige and power actually depended only on the number of wives that one possessed. In this case, however, this eldest son had, in place of his father, to provide a wife for his younger brothers and the sons of his sisters. As far as impediments [582] to marriage were concerned, generally they strictly observed the impediment of blood relationship; two blood relatives, even in a distant degree, should never enter into marriage, [541] with the exception of the irregularities mentioned above. As for relatives by marriage, these do not exist for them in any degree. There is, nevertheless, one case that somewhat resembles relationship by marriage, namely, the Nkita might never be in the home of a man together with the woman whose Nkita she was. Thus, the son-in-law or the brother-in-law might never take the Nkita of his wife into his home. If, however, the wife had left or died, there was no further impediment.

587 428 431 When, like the inheritance above, the family had returned the bride price and had then married the woman to another man, this second husband also had to give a gift to the one who, according to the law of inheritance, had the right to the wife. This gift was called a bampanga.

587 428 If the wife who was freed by the family had children, only a part of the bride price had to be returned. Sometimes the wife was freed completely through her children. The children then remained with the family of the deceased husband, and they then represented the value of the bride price of their mother. If, however, such a woman was married again by her family, they demanded a second bride price for that.

587 428 583 Sometimes a single woman was the Nkita of several other women. In the inheritance several people then had a right over her, and everyone demanded his share. For instance, a young man

587 had to acquire a wife with the bride price or with a supplement of
428 the bride price of his sisters. Three of his sisters, for instance, were
583 married, and he needed 3,000 mitako to pay for his intended wife. Now he went with presents to his three brothers-in-law and asked for 1,000 mitako from each of them. The bride price was already paid to the father; the 1,000 mitako that he asks are a supplement of the bride price.

With these 3,000 mitako, our young man pays for his wife. This wife now becomes the Nkita of the three sisters. If this young man dies, his three sisters and his three brothers-in-law all demand their share back from the widow. If she is sold, the price must be divided among the three brothers-in-law. If she remains in the family of her husband, with the uncle or brother, she continues to be the Nkita of her three sisters-in-law.

431 [542] There also exists a general rule and custom that the
583 family which has received the bride price regularly give gifts to their daughter and son-in-law or sister and brother-in-law. These gifts consisted of goats, dogs (which also have a rather large value among the natives), ducks, etc., but the gifts never consisted of money. These gifts were in turn given by the son-in-law or brother-in-law to the one who had helped him pay the bride price.

For instance, if the young man of whom we just spoke received gifts from the family of his wife, he would then have given these gifts to his three brothers-in-law. These gifts were often so much that the value of them was almost equal to the bride price that the man had paid for his wife. Custom demanded, in such a case, that the man then pay a supplement to the bride price.

In case the bride price had to be given back, the gifts that the family had already given might be subtracted from the bride price. When such disputes are brought before a European, it is difficult for him to settle them, for the value is tremendously exaggerated by the parties. The husband will demand the return of a much larger bride price than he actually gave, while the family on its side will estimate the gifts that they had given as much higher than the actual value or amount.

436 Something about prices, the bride price for wives, and native money value.

Their first original money was as follows.

436 1. Benkata: this was thin iron or copper wire rolled into small rings; the thickness of the wire was about 3 millimeters; the length, 20 to 25 centimeters.

2. Bingetele: iron or copper bars about 8 millimeters thick and 15 centimeters long; these are still in use in Bikoro.

436 301 3. Bekata: copper wire; thickness about 7 or 8 millimeters, and 1 meter or 1.50 meters long; spiral shaped; the women wore these rolled around their legs as copper leggings.

[543] 4. Bakonga: copper rings which served as arm bands and foot bands and also as collars. The size differed for small or large persons; the weight is from one half kilo to 5 kilos.

436 5. Mitako: copper wire about 4 millimeters thick and 25 centimeters long, usually bent like a hairpin. The mitako served as a uniform currency, from which the other values and prices were reckoned, like the franc with us. The value of the mitako was formerly reckoned at five centimes.

● 583 435 Formerly the bride price, which was paid for a wife in almost all of Equatorial Africa, was from 5 to 20 bakonga. (The value of the bakonga differed greatly according to the weight. The average value, however, is estimated at 2.50 francs.) This payment was further supplemented with slaves or wives. This manner of payment and the bride price still exist in the districts where the natives have not yet, or practically not, come in contact with Europeans. Also, [567] it was sometimes paid with only slaves or women. The price for one female slave was relatively much less than for another woman.

178 583 Through the occupation of the Congo by Europeans, the family life of the natives has necessarily undergone great changes, and their customs and habits as well.

In the first place the natives have found themselves deprived of their wives by the sentinels of the Independent Congo State. [661] These black sentinels, appointed in the villages by the State to supervise the reaping of caoutchouc, assumed an unlimited power. They took as many wives of the natives as they chose and did not pay for a single one.

Next many black soldiers, servant boys, and workmen of the Europeans also took wives everywhere in the beginning, without bothering about the native customs, that is, without paying for those wives; and this often happened under the protective power of their Whites.

178 583 We can add to that also a large number of black women who became the famous "housekeepers" of the Europeans. Although payment for these women was usually given to their owners, they were still withdrawn from the family life and the native customs. Finally, the Christian women, who now live in Christian marriage, must also be mentioned.

In addition, the price of wives and the bride price have [544] undergone great changes, primarily in those districts where the natives came into more immediate contact with Europeans. Before the arrival of the Europeans, their main medium of payment was the woman herself; a woman was paid for with a woman. Now it is forbidden to use women as currency. Therefore the natives have raised the price in the payment of bakonga and mitako.

178 583 435 In some districts close to the European centers, the natives have brought the price for wives and the bride price to a height never before known. For one wife they ask several nkesi.

A nkesi is 10,000 mitako. Such a sum is much too high in relation to their means. In a village there are, for instance, 50 women; for one woman, 40,000 to 50,000 mitako are asked, while at present in the whole village together the sum of 50,000 mitako is no more to be found. Therefore to oblige someone to pay two or three nkesi is usually to make it impossible for him to pay, or rather to make it necessary for him to pay with women, which is nothing else than encouraging woman trade, which then occurs.

802 177 A remark should also be made here about the nomenclature of the numerals. Nkesi is not a word of the Equatorial peoples; it *was brought in from elsewhere with the Europeans.* Their amounts were as follows:

10 was jum or bonkama;

100 was nkoto; and with the arrival of the Whites and foreign population came

1,000 nkesi.

The present numerical value is: 10, jum; 100, bonkama; 1,000, nkoto; and 10,000, nkesi. Some very old Negroes, however, still say bonkama for 10.

[583] This is the probable origin of the great rise in price of wives, especially in the area of Coquilhatville.

178 When the first Europeans arrived at Leopoldville and
439 Brazzaville, it was not long before European materials and other
583 articles also came to Coquilhatville to the hands of the great village chiefs who carried on trade on the rivers, primarily in slaves and ivory. The village chiefs, Yoma from the village of Boyeka, Ibuka of Boyere, Yamba of [545] Eala, Nkake of Bokele, etc., carried these European articles up the Tshuapa and Ikelemba rivers, and they bought slaves and wives with them.

Returning home again, they bought wives from their own district and paid for them with the slaves and women whom they themselves had bought cheaply with the European articles. For one woman of their district they paid three or four women. The arrival
[802] of the Whites and foreign Blacks acquainted them with the number nkesi which, however, in their definition was only 1,000 and which they formerly called 10 nkoto or 10 times 100.

178 It was not long before the Europeans had to concern themselves
583 with hearing disputes over the wives. In the Black land such a thing is unavoidable. Whenever the Blacks came to the Whites with their disputes, they dared not or would not say, "I paid for this woman with three women, but they said, "I paid for this woman with three nkesi," that is, 3 times 1,000 mitako. Meanwhile, the nkoto and nkesi acquired their value of 1,000 and 10,000. The statement, however, that a woman was paid for with nkesi was retained, through the error of the Whites or through the greed of the polygynists or both. Indeed, later some women were paid for with nkesi, namely, when the prevalent currency in the Congo was the mitako. It was also no wonder, for the polygynists had a monopoly on the wives, and it was to their advantage to raise the price.

Therefore, if the native of Coquilhatville says now that his father or his uncle paid for that woman with three or four nkesi, this generally means that the wife was paid for with three or four women. The price of the women in Wangata, near Coquilhatville, was formerly no higher than in the other areas. Many women were paid for with only five bakonga, for instance, in Bokala, near Bamania, a village which belonged to the village chief Yoma of Boyeka.

178 It should also be noted that the nkesi which have been paid
583 in recent years in Wangata have been paid not in mitako or in
435

currency, but in articles on which the natives fix a conventional price, usually much higher than the actual value. Thus, for instance, a pataki, or piston rifle, was always reckoned at 3,000 mitako; it did not matter that it was only worth 1,500. There are, [546] therefore, only very few women who are paid for with nkesi in real currency or mitako.

The tragic result of this exaggerated rise in prices is that the mutual debts and difficulties among the natives have been increased, so that they are almost impossible to solve. In the attempt to settle a dispute, five other disputes come into it, all equally complicated, for the simple reason that the money, the mitako, to be paid does not exist, and it is forbidden to pay with women. To settle a dispute, several months are sometimes necessary, or a whole year. Other disputes never end, but pass on from father to son and are brought by each one in turn before each new District Administrator. In the districts where the bride price has not been raised, the difficulties and disputes are not nearly as numerous and are easy to solve. In the districts where the purchase price and the bride price of the women have become excessively high, the natives themselves admit that their disputes could formerly be solved easily, but that this is at present almost impossible.

It is unnecessary to say that this situation is harmful to the task of civilizing [the country] and to the mutual good relations of the natives. The natives are constantly coming to the District Administrator of the area to lay before him their disputes over women *who have not been paid for. These disputes* take up a great deal of the costly time of the administrator. He must hear and settle these usually very complicated disputes, for often the general peace of a village or district depends on it.

Also the natives themselves spend whole days and weeks doing nothing besides holding meetings to discuss the unpayable debts of bride price and the purchase price of wives, simply because the prices are excessive. For lack of currency, they pay each other with each other's debts, which usually complicates the business even more.

To improve this condition, the price of women and the bride price should be lowered, greatly lowered. We have seen that this was possible and practical when once a District Administrator who knew the native customs very well in the area of Coquilhatville really began to do it.

000 [547] Unfortunately the system was not continued. Also, it must not be said that it would be unjust to lower the price of the women. Rather, injustice would thus be redressed, a degenerate custom be improved. Through the present system, ever more injustice is committed and suffered.

583 595 A few polygynists would suffer some material loss through the lowering of the price of the women, namely, by receiving less for one woman than they (sometimes) paid for them, for they inherited most of the women. But they are also the ones who are responsible for the irregular situation. In a large part of the district, the polygynists are by far the minority of the population. They are the ones who are hostile to the Colonial Administration. They are in possession of the women and have a monopoly on them. They fix prices which a young man can almost never pay, namely, two nkesi at least.

583 The difficulties for Christian marriages become daily still more difficult. This is true for the marriages already entered into and for the future marriages.

583 428 426 [465 511] The bride price to be paid for the wife ought to be such that every young man can pay that sum with his own money, with the money that he has earned himself by his work. This sum cannot be high, for the ordinary working man in the Congo, who makes up the large part of the population, does not earn much more than what he needs for board and clothing. Therefore to pay an excessively large sum as a bride price forces him to borrow and to run up debts among his relatives and friends. The result of this is that the system of the Nkita goes over unnoticed into the Christian marriages, and the woman remains an object for inheritance. Indeed, when the man dies the creditors will come, namely, those who have loaned him money -- and demand the wife. The disputes over the bride price then begin anew, and they will again give the wife in marriage in return for a new bride price. Thus, there is no end to it. The wife, the mother, will never achieve any rights but will always remain an object of inheritance. There has been talk about declaring the widow free at the death of her husband in order to prevent the inheriting of wives, but how will it be possible to [548] achieve that if the bride price is not lessened, considerably lessened? When a

583 428 426 young man can pay for his wife, or rather pay her bride price with his own earned money, then that wife becomes his property. At his death, no creditors or mortgage holders can come to demand the wife since she will then actually be free. There will also be no difficulty in making her heir to the property of her husband, for herself and her children. The bride price or payment for wives among the civilized Blacks could be very much simplified. To abolish it would not be so easy. Indeed, it seems to be in the customs and the habits of the whole Black race. Then too, with respect to bride price, usually still in entanglements with their heathen relatives.

The bride price, as it exists among the heathens, will always remain a source of difficulties for civilization and a support for polygyny.

000 When the price is lowered, the large number of wives of polygynists will be seen to disperse and go to the men who have no wife. Thus, single marriages will be increased, and the district, whose population is greatly decreased, will become populated again. Lowering the price will also prevent women being paid for with women; and thus the trading of women will be hindered, since then the whole bride price can be paid in currency. It is also anticipated that the woman will become less a material object; and by changing the wife from an object of inheritance to an heiress, her moral value will be raised in her own eyes and in the eyes of the men.

In order to civilize the land, Christian marriages must be established. In order to establish Christian marriages, the impediments that stand in the way must be removed, and everything be put to work to benefit what the good outcome of that can assure.

[549] Family Nomenclature

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The name of:	is given to:
Ise, father	one's own father brothers of the father sons and grandsons of father's sisters